

USA probes mystery cloud reported off Japan

By Derek Wood

AMERICAN EXPERTS are investigating a mystery cloud, possibly resulting from some form of explosion, which caused an airline pilot to call for an emergency course deviation over the Pacific last month.

On 9 April at 1409 GMT, a Japanese Airlines Boeing 747 freighter en route Tokyo-Anchorage, at 33 000 ft, encountered the phenomenon 370 km east of Miyako on the coast of Honshu. The captain, a former US Air Force B-52 pilot, made a mayday call and reported a cloud form resembling the top half of a ball which quadrupled in size in 30 seconds and rose to over 18 280 m. He was given permission to change course on the airway to avoid the cloud.

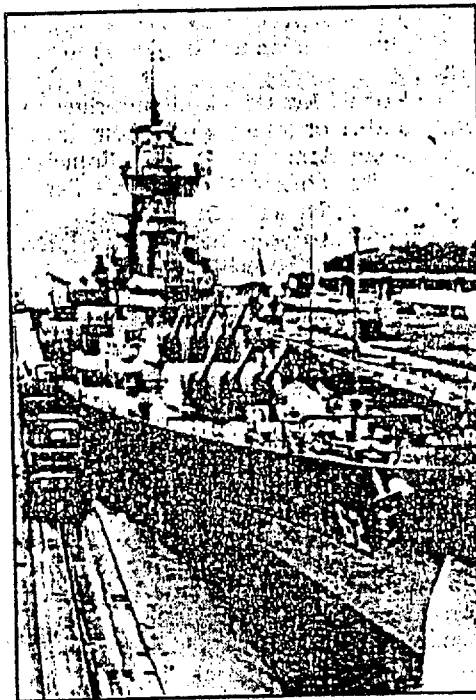
His sighting was confirmed by KLM and JAL passenger flights in the area and by two Flying Tiger cargo aircraft. All five airliners were checked on arrival in Alaska for radioactivity but none was found.

The US Federal Aviation Authority issued a NOTAM warning of a possible radiological event before the aircraft arrived for checking. The NOTAM was still in force at the time of writing.

US military sources reported no seismic or nuclear activity at the time. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration satellite surveillance section had pictures about two hours after the report, showing a clear high pressure area but obscured by cirrus cloud. Some 18 hours later the satellite found thin cirrus cloud over the area, with a 'boomerang' shaped cloud near the surface but well to the west over Japan, at 40°N, 141°E. NASA has since been doing computer work to determine the cloud's height and temperature.

The week before the incident the FAA issued a NOTAM on possible Soviet tests at 47°N, 150°E but there is nothing to relate these to the cloud.

New Jersey transits Panama Canal



▲ The 45 000 ton battleship USS New Jersey squeezes through the Panama Canal locks on 27 April en route to Long Beach, California, after an extended tour of duty off the coast of Lebanon (AP Laserphoto)

Mexico buys Panhard VBL scout car

By Adrian English

THE MEXICAN Government has become the first recorded purchaser of the new Panhard *véhicule blindé léger* (VBL) scout car with an order for 27 vehicles.

The VBL, developed in response to a requirement by the French Army for a light armoured reconnaissance vehicle in the three tonne range, accommodates a normal crew of three in a fully enclosed body measuring 3.7 m long by 2.02 m wide and has a nett height of 1.70 m to top of hull.

The front-mounted 2500 cc Peugeot XD3T water-cooled four-cylinder diesel engine produces 95 hp at 4150 rpm and gives a maximum road speed of 95 km/h and a maximum range of 750 km.

Normal armament consists of a ring-mounted 7.62 mm machine gun, although a number of alternative armament fits are on offer.

Barcelona air show

SPAIN IS TO join the international air show scene this year with its own Cosmo-84 which is to be held in Barcelona 2-10 June, with emphasis on the South and Central American, African and Arab markets.

The material on show will range from military aircraft and their equipment, through items such as avionics and navigation equipment, to the components industry and general aviation. Cosmo-84 is being held in co-operation with the Barcelona Fair and the static exhibition will be in Hall No 1 of the Barcelona Exhibition Centre. Aircraft exhibitors will have air-conditioned bungalows at the International Airport.

Big expansion projected for Indian Navy

By Pushpinder Singh in New Delhi

CONCERNED WITH the growing "militarisation of the Indian Ocean", the Indian Government is understood to have stipulated long-term perspective plans to enhance the blue-water capabilities of the Indian Navy and give a new dimension to its strike power.

The plans include expansion of indigenous warship production (missile-equipped *Godavari* class frigates and HDW-designed SSKs are to be built at Mazagaon Dockyards, Bombay, while fast patrol craft and other smaller vessels are built at Garden Reach Workshops, Calcutta), as well as acquisition of a new generation of cruisers, destroyers, long-range surface-to-surface missiles and the latest ECM equipment.

Naval commentators believe the modernisation and expansion of the navy would require about 5000 more personnel in various categories

(conventional armament), 'Kresta-II' class cruisers and additional 'Kashin-II' class guided missile destroyers from the Soviet Union.

Also planned for acquisition are four more 'Nanuchka-II' missile-corvettes and up to six more 'Natyasha' class ocean minesweepers. The Indian Navy is interested in the longer range ship-launched SS-N-14 missiles along with associated radar, for fitment on the planned cruisers and destroyers.

Meanwhile, INAS 300 'White Tigers' are now fully operational with the Sea Harrier FRS Mk 51 on board the carrier INS *Vikrant* and discussions continue for a follow-on batch of more Sea Harriers, both the FRS Mk 51 and T 60 two-seat trainer.

The Indian Navy's air force is also being substantially augmented by 20 Sea King Mk 42B helicopters, fitted with MEL Super Searcher radar. The Sea Eagle anti-ship missile is also being tested for the Indian Navy becoming the